



Employer Perspectives on Hiring Youth Previously Involved with Juvenile Justice: A National Survey

Deanne K. Unruh · Kyle Reardon  · Lisa Strycker

Accepted: 4 October 2023
© The Author(s) 2023

Abstract Employment is a defining aspect of adult life as well as a protective factor for youth involved in the juvenile justice system, but employment rates for juvenile-justice-involved youth are substantially lower than for their noninvolved peers. Interventions have been developed to increase employment for juvenile-justice-involved youth, yet few studies have examined employer perspectives about hiring them. The purpose of this replication study was to document employer perceptions of hiring youth in the juvenile justice system; whether youth should disclose prior involvement in the system; and the skills and qualifications that employers value in their workers. Findings indicate that, relative to the results of prior studies, employers' perceptions appear to have improved such that they are more likely to hire youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system. This research provides insights into how educators, behavior analysts, and other rehabilitation and support personnel can help these youth obtain employment, and

suggests future research directions to further reduce hiring stigma.

Keywords Juvenile justice system · Employment · Career readiness

Meaningful employment is a cornerstone of adult life and has been identified as a critical need for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Not only does employment promote financial independence, but it can also provide individuals with confidence, self-determination, supportive relationships, and pro-social engagement in the community. Research has shown that employment contributes to the development of positive and stable identities, quality of life, and future career success and potential earnings (Shandra & Hogan, 2008; Wagner et al., 2005). Nonetheless, studies consistently document significantly lower employment rates for youth with criminal histories compared to peers (Kaye, 2010; Lauer & Houtenville, 2018; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2010; Schur et al., 2013; Stapleton & Burkhauser, 2003).

Being employed or enrolled in school after incarceration is a protective factor for young offenders, and reduces recidivism rates (Ashford & Gallagher, 2019; Bullis et al., 2002; Mathur & Griller Clark, 2014). Incarceration rates of youth in the juvenile justice system have significantly decreased over the past decade (National Juvenile Justice Network & Texas

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43494-023-00110-z>.

D. K. Unruh · K. Reardon (✉)
College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR,
USA
e-mail: kreardon@uoregon.edu

L. Strycker
Oregon Research Institute, Springfield, OR, USA

Public Policy Foundation, 2013), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Casey Foundation, 2020). More of these youth are being served in community corrections programs, in which employment may be required. Community-based corrections, workforce, and rehabilitation personnel are tasked with supporting a youth's successful engagement in the community, and that often includes being employed.

Importance of Employment

Preparing students for employment (i.e., the “demand side”) has been a dominant theme of secondary education and transition programs for more than 2 decades (Ameri et al., 2018; National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth, 2009; Wehmeyer & Webb, 2011; World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). Less emphasis has been placed on research examining the willingness of employers to hire youth with criminal histories (i.e., the “supply side”). On the demand side, the employment literature to date has examined strategies to improve employment readiness, and identified factors influencing employment outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system (Gilbride et al., 2003; Ju et al., 2013; Ju et al., 2014). Much of this research has focused on providing youth with reentry services and employment-related supports (Mathur & Griller Clark, 2014; Pham et al., 2015; Unruh et al., 2019). On the supply side, there is still much to learn about employers and their hiring practices. A few preliminary studies have examined the attitudes of employers and how they influence employment outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system (e.g., Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2015; Morgan & Alexander, 2005). For example, Pham et al. (2015) found that 62% of employers preferred that job applicants disclose previous involvement with juvenile justice services, either on the job application or during the interview. In a recent study, Griller Clark et al. (2020) reported that the stigma of incarceration influenced the willingness of employers to interview potentially qualified candidates.

Individuals with criminal histories face both structural and social stigma when seeking employment (Decker et al., 2015; Griller Clark

et al., 2020; Ott & McTier, 2020). In an exploratory study, Griller Clark et al. (2020) found that employers were more likely to interview youth without a juvenile record compared to those having a record, and also that employers were more likely to interview youth with a record of nonviolent crimes compared to those with a record of violent offenses. Structural stigma occurs when employment entities exclude ex-offenders from the hiring process. Positive employer attitudes can lead to improved employment outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system, but systemic discrimination creates employment barriers for this population (Joseph et al., 2017; Livermore & Goodman, 2009).

Employment rates across business and service sectors influence employers' attitudes toward hiring youth involved in the juvenile justice system (Unger, 2002). For context, the present study was completed towards the end of the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic when widespread job losses had occurred. Turmoil in the labor market has persisted postpandemic, with differing trends across demographic groups, states, and sectors (Aughinbaugh et al., 2022). Multiple industries have more job openings than qualified unemployed workers to fill them, including the hospitality and tourism industry (Kwok, 2021), durable goods manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, education, financial activities, and health services (Ferguson & Lucy, 2023). Other sectors, such as transportation, construction, and mining, have worker surpluses (Ferguson, 2022). The situation indicates that labor shortages can increase opportunities for a broader range of individuals. Employers that need workers may relax hiring requirements, and offer higher wages, sign-on bonuses, safer work environments, on-the-job training and internship programs, and remote work opportunities to attract and retain employees (Goda & Soltas, 2022).

Research has shown that personal traits influence employment decisions, and that youth having more qualifications for work may increase employability and employment rates (Cerdeira et al., 2015). Employers seek evidence that the individuals they hire have the necessary workplace skills and experience to perform the job for which they are hired (Decker et al., 2015; Varghese et al., 2010).

Need for Employment-Related Interventions

A recent report for the National Center on Learning Disabilities offered multiple policy recommendations for improving systems to support youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Two recommendations relevant for the present study were: (1) implementation of evidence-based practices for youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system; and (2) increased access to high-quality, well-rounded community services for youth (Snydman, 2022). In line with this advice, the current study sought to document the attitudes and perspectives of employers toward hiring youth involved in the juvenile justice system in order to enable workforce and rehabilitation personnel, educators, and juvenile services staff to give these youth better guidance for securing employment. The overall poor employment experiences of at-risk adolescents after leaving high school, combined with evidence that most either do not complete school or do not proceed to postsecondary education, points to the need for a deeper understanding of the employment challenges and barriers faced by youth in the juvenile justice system.

Current Study

This study's purpose was to replicate portions of the Pham et al. (2015) and Mathur et al. (2020) surveys conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to gain a better understanding of current employer perceptions for hiring youth in the juvenile justice system; whether youth should disclose prior involvement in the system; and the skills and qualifications that employers value in their workers. Research questions were as follows:

1. What are the perspectives of employers toward, and experiences with, hiring youth in the juvenile justice system?
2. Do employers believe job applicants should disclose prior involvement in the juvenile justice system?
3. What do employers identify as important qualifications and personal factors for hiring youth in the juvenile justice system?

4. To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic affected employer perceptions toward hiring youth in the juvenile justice system?

Method

Participants

Participants were 1,469 employers in the United States. Respondents were 48% male, 51% female, and 1% another gender identity. Age ranges were 18–34 years (28%), 35–54 years (50%), and 55 years or older (22%). Most respondents (74%) identified as white, with lesser percentages of Black or African American (13%), Asian or Pacific Islander (6%), American Indian or Alaska Native (2%), multiracial (1%), and other (5%) races/ethnicities. Most were non-Hispanic (82%); 17% identified as Hispanic, and 1% did not specify. Participants were identified through screening as individuals responsible for making hiring decisions at their workplaces: 36% were general managers or supervisors, 23% were hiring managers, 22% were owners/presidents/chief executive officers, 9% were human resources personnel, and 11% were other positions. In terms of geography, 38% of respondents were from the South, 24% from the West, 21% from the Midwest, and 17% from the Northeast.

A variety of industries were surveyed, including 11% from construction and architecture, 11% from health care and human services, 11% from information technology, 10% from retail/sales, and 14% from other sectors. Most businesses (62%) were for-profit and independently owned. About 10% were a local ownership of a for-profit franchise; 9% were local, city, or state government agencies; 8% were a local branch of a national for-profit corporation; 7% were nongovernmental, not-for-profit organizations; and 4% indicated another option. Number of employees at the businesses surveyed were 500+ (21%), 101–499 (20%), 51–100 (17%), 10–50 (24%), and less than 10 (18%). About 9% of businesses did not require any education, 17% required only a General Educational Diploma, 35% required a high school diploma, 9% required an associate's degree, and 17% required a bachelor's degree.

About a third of employers (34%) said they had previously hired someone convicted of a crime as a juvenile. About 18% indicated they had personally

been convicted or adjudicated of a crime as a juvenile or adult, and 30% said they knew a family member or friend who had been convicted or adjudicated of a crime as a juvenile or adult.

Survey Instrument

The survey developed for this study (see Appendix A for all survey items and response options) assessed the attitudes and perspectives of employers toward hiring youth in the juvenile justice system. To ensure content validity, the survey instrument was informed by two previous studies that documented the perspectives of employers toward issues of disclosure and hiring for these youth (Griller Clark et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2015). In particular, several items (see items 15, 16, and 17) were replicated from Pham et al. (2015) to understand changes over time in employer attitudes. Additional items (see items 16 and 17) concerning influential factors for employers' decisions to hire youth and the impact of work qualifications on decisions to offer an interview, respectively, were replicated from Griller Clark et al. (2020). Several new questions were developed and included in the survey to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market and hiring practices. The survey was tested in a pilot study with about 140 respondents (10% of sample size) to ensure feasibility and content validity. The pilot test performed as intended, and no changes were made for the full survey. The final instrument (see Appendix A) comprised 24 questions across three sections: (1) demographic variables; (2) hiring practices regarding youth in the juvenile justice system; and (3) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hiring practices. The survey took respondents approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Procedures

Participant recruitment, survey distribution, and data collection occurred over approximately 3 weeks. The survey was administered through Qualtrics, a third-party online survey platform and dissemination company (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Based on Dillman (2007), we determined that a sample size of 1,400 respondents would be sufficient to analyze between- and within-group differences. Qualtrics screened all potential respondents to ensure they met the inclusion criterion of being an individual responsible for hiring

decisions at the workplace. Participants provided informed consent prior to beginning the survey; no confidential or identifying information was collected. The final sample totaled 1,469 respondents meeting inclusion criteria. Response data were accessed through the Qualtrics survey platform after the contracted fee was paid.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this research was to learn more about the perspectives of employers toward hiring individuals involved in juvenile justice settings. Given the exploratory nature of the study, we primarily used descriptive statistics to address the research questions. Descriptive statistics and frequency counts were used to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3. Chi-square tests of independence were used to answer research questions 1, 2, and 4. For research question 3, we made descriptive comparisons to prior studies. All statistical analyses were conducted using R (Version 4.2.1; R Core Team, 2022) and the R packages *broom* (Robinson & Hayes, 2019), *devtools* (Version 2.2.1; Wickham et al., 2019b), *dplyr* (Version 0.8.3; Wickham et al., 2019a), *here* (Version 0.1; Müller, 2017), *janitor* (Version 1.2.0; Firke, 2019), *psych* (Version 1.8.12; Revelle, 2018), *rio* (Version 0.5.16; Chan et al., 2018), and *tidyverse* (Version 1.2.1; Wickham, 2017).

Results

Employer Perspectives on Hiring Justice-Involved Youth

To address research question 1 examining the perspectives of employers toward, and experiences with, hiring youth in the juvenile justice system, we calculated descriptive statistics and frequencies of responses to the survey question "If given the opportunity in the future, how likely would you be to hire job applicants who have been involved in the juvenile justice system?" (Question 15) and compared responses to the results obtained by Pham et al. (2015). Results indicated that 28% of respondents were very likely to hire individuals with a record of incarceration, 41% were likely, 18% were not likely, and 14% were not sure (see Fig. 1). Pham et al. (2015)

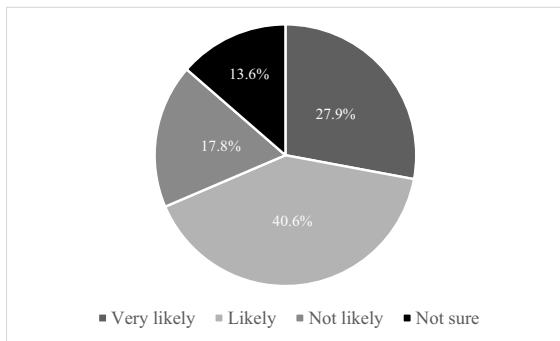


Fig. 1 Likelihood of employers to hire individuals currently or previously involved in juvenile services

reported that 10% of employers were very likely, 48% were likely, 25% were not likely, and 16% were not sure. The finding that 69% of the respondents in this study reported that they would be likely or very likely to hire juvenile-justice-involved youth represents an 11 percentile increase from the 58% reported by Pham et al. (2015).

To investigate these results in greater depth, we conducted chi-square analyses between responses to the same question (Question 15) and several demographic and business characteristics, including gender, age, race, ethnicity, position, geographic region, business sector, structure of business, size of business, education level required, whether the respondent had previously been convicted of a criminal offense, and whether the respondent had a close friend or family member convicted of a criminal offense. The result for gender identity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, n = 1,453) = 19.40, p < .001$, with the largest contribution coming from women more frequently saying “not sure” than men (17% vs. 10%). The result for age was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, n = 1,469) = 35.29, p < .001$, with respondents age 55+ more frequently responding “not sure” or “not likely” than younger respondents. The result for race was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12, n = 1,469) = 23.99, p < .05$, with African American respondents more often reporting that they would be “likely” or “very likely” to hire youth in the juvenile justice system and Asian and Pacific Islander respondents more frequently reporting “not likely.” The result for ethnicity was not statistically significant.

Several business-related variables were also found to be statistically significant. Results for the

respondent’s position in the business were statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, n = 1,469) = 17.99, p < .05$, with general managers and supervisors reporting that they would be “not likely” to hire youth in the juvenile justice system if given the opportunity, and a majority of owners reporting that they would be “likely” or “very likely” to hire such youth. The result for business sector was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(42, n = 1,469) = 109.09, p < .001$, with respondents from the construction field more often reporting that they would be “likely” or “very likely” to hire youth involved in the juvenile justice system and those from the transportation industry more apt to say “not likely.” Business structure was statistically significant, $\chi^2(15, n = 1,469) = 33.33, p < .01$, with nonprofit representatives reporting that they would be “less likely” than other business structures to hire youth in the juvenile justice system. Education level was statistically significant, $\chi^2(18, n = 1,469) = 80.41, p < .001$, with a majority of businesses requiring a bachelor’s degree reporting that they would be “not likely” to hire youth involved in the juvenile justice system and those requiring only a General Educational Diploma more apt to report willingness (i.e., “likely” or “very likely”) to hire these youth. Results for respondents who had previously been adjudicated or convicted of a criminal offense were statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, n = 1,469) = 133.86, p < .001$, with those responding “yes” more often reporting being willing to hire youth in the juvenile justice system (i.e., “likely” or “very likely”). Those who had a family member or friend convicted of a criminal offense also more frequently indicated willingness to hire (i.e., “likely” or “very likely”) these youth, $\chi^2(3, n = 1,469) = 127.61, p < .001$. Results for geographic region and size of business were statistically nonsignificant.

Importance of Disclosure

Procedures for addressing the second research question (whether employers believe job applicants should disclose prior involvement in the juvenile justice system) were similar to those described above, this time examining responses to the question “Even if juveniles are ‘adjudicated’ of crimes as opposed to convicted, should youth disclose their prior juvenile criminal history when applying for a job?” (Question 17). Response options for this question (see Appendix A) included “no, they should not disclose their

prior juvenile justice involvement,” “yes, they should disclose their prior juvenile justice involvement,” or “I am not sure, it depends on the circumstances.” Results indicated that 40% of respondents believed that individuals should disclose, 27% believed they should not, and 14% were unsure (see Fig. 2). Utilizing this same question, Pham et al. (2015) reported that 62% of their sample believed individuals should disclose, 11% believed they should not, and 27% were unsure. This represents a 22 percentile change in employers believing that youth should disclose previous involvement with the juvenile justice system. Figure 3 depicts responses to the question “If a youth chooses to disclose their involvement in the juvenile

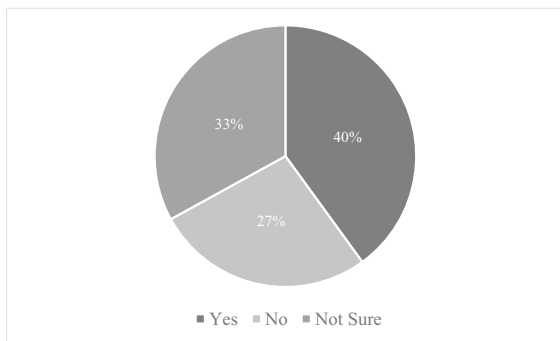
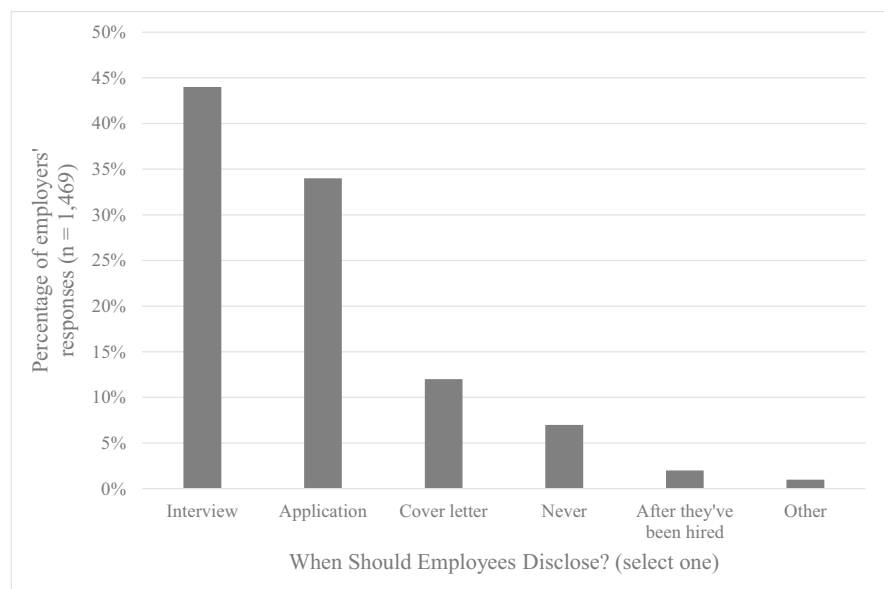


Fig. 2 Employer perspectives on whether prospective employees should disclose their involvement in juvenile services

Fig. 3 Employer perspectives on when prospective employees should disclose their involvement in juvenile services



justice system, when would be the most appropriate time?” (Question 18). Regarding the most appropriate time to disclose juvenile justice involvement (see Appendix A for response options), 44% of respondents indicated during the interview, 34% indicated on the application, 12% indicated in a cover letter, 2% indicated after being hired, and 1% indicated some other time. About 7% of respondents said job applicants should never disclose. Respondents were asked to select only one response option to this question.

To examine these response patterns further, we conducted chi-square analyses between responses to Question 17 and demographic and business characteristics. The result for gender was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,453) = 27.65, p < .001$, with men more often saying that individuals should disclose and women more apt to be unsure. The result for age was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, n = 1,469) = 24.42, p < .001$, with those 55+ more frequently reporting that individuals should not disclose relative to the other age groups. Results for race, ethnicity, position in business, and geographic region were not statistically significant.

The result for business sector was statistically significant, $\chi^2(28, n = 1,469) = 85.55, p < .001$, with respondents from the information technology and hospitality sectors more apt to say that youth should disclose. Business structure was statistically significant, $\chi^2(10, n = 1,469) = 27.77, p < .01$, with

respondents from for-profit franchises more often reporting that youth should disclose. Education level was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12, n = 1,469), 54.94, p < .001$, with businesses requiring bachelor’s or master’s degrees more frequently responding that youth should disclose, and businesses requiring an associate’s degree or no qualifications more apt to say that youth should not disclose. Respondents who had previously been convicted or adjudicated more often responded that youth should not disclose, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,469) = 10.2, p < .01$, as did respondents who had a friend or family member convicted or adjudicated, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,469) = 9.49, p < .01$. The result for business size was statistically nonsignificant.

Influential Factors and Employability Qualifications

To address the third research question examining what employers identify as important qualifications and personal factors for hiring youth in the juvenile

justice system, we calculated descriptive statistics for responses to the question “How important are the following factors in your decision to hire young persons who have been involved in the juvenile justice system?” (Question 16; see Appendix A for the list of response options and rating anchors) and the question “Please rate the following work qualifications on how likely they would be to increase the chances of extending an interview to an applicant who has disclosed being involved in juvenile services” (Question 19; see Appendix A for a list of work qualification response options and rating anchors). Descriptive results for these two items are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Results showed that most respondents indicated that the following were important or very important for hiring youth in the juvenile justice system: nature of the offense (72%), personal belief in offering second chances (71%), business liability (64%), type of position (59%), and company policy (57%). Half

Table 1 Employer perspectives on impact of contextual factors on the decision to hire youth involved in the juvenile justice system

Influential Factor	Not important <i>n</i> (%)	Somewhat important <i>n</i> (%)	Important <i>n</i> (%)	Very important <i>n</i> (%)
Company policy	348 (24%)	282 (19%)	455 (31%)	384 (26%)
Type of position	305 (21%)	303 (21%)	478 (33%)	383 (26%)
Nature of offense	203 (14%)	200 (14%)	374 (25%)	692 (47%)
Business liability	260 (18%)	269 (18%)	455 (31%)	485 (33%)
Belief in second chances	167 (11%)	262 (18%)	439 (30%)	601 (41%)
Individual has been bonded	351 (24%)	384 (26%)	395 (27%)	339 (23%)

Table 2 Employer perspectives on impact of work qualifications on the decision to hire youth involved in the juvenile justice system

Work Qualification	No impact <i>n</i> (%)	Slight impact <i>n</i> (%)	Moderate impact <i>n</i> (%)	High impact <i>n</i> (%)
Driver’s license	300 (20%)	225 (15%)	476 (32%)	468 (32%)
High school diploma	194 (13%)	254 (17%)	449 (31%)	572 (39%)
Passed background check	154 (10%)	210 (14%)	446 (30%)	659 (45%)
Passed drug test	196 (13%)	200 (14%)	362 (25%)	711 (48%)
First aid/CPR training	579 (39%)	339 (23%)	303 (21%)	248 (17%)
ServSafe® certification	607 (41%)	287 (20%)	309 (21%)	266 (18%)
OSHA training	370 (25%)	293 (20%)	376 (26%)	330 (22%)
Microsoft Office skills	491 (33%)	319 (22%)	359 (24%)	300 (20%)
Advanced computer skills	441 (30%)	302 (21%)	376 (26%)	350 (24%)
Industry-specific qualification	345 (23%)	296 (20%)	426 (29%)	402 (27%)
Prior full-time work	228 (16%)	289 (20%)	433 (29%)	519 (35%)
Prior part-time work	244 (17%)	353 (24%)	491 (33%)	381 (26%)
References	211 (14%)	284 (19%)	476 (32%)	498 (34%)

of respondents (50%) said it was important or very important that the individual be bonded.

Most employers reported that the following work qualifications would have a moderate to high impact on the chances of extending an interview to an applicant who had disclosed being involved with the juvenile justice system: passing a background check (75%), passing a drug test (73%), earning a high school diploma (70%), having references from a previous employer (66%), and having a driver's license (64%). About half of employers believed that the following would have a moderate to high impact: prior part-time work (59%), prior full-time work (56%), industry-specific qualifications (56%), and advanced computer skills (50%). A minority of employers believed the following would have a moderate to high impact: OSHA training (48%), Microsoft Office skills (44%), ServSafe Food Handler's certification (39%), and first aid/CPR certification (38%).

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

To answer the fourth research question regarding the impact of the labor shortage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we analyzed data from four survey questions: (1) "What is the level (i.e., "no problem whatsoever," "slight problem," "moderate problem," or "severe problem") of labor shortage and/or lack of qualified workers to fill needed positions in your company?" (Question 20); (2) "Have you experienced any labor shortage and/or lack of qualified workers to fill needed positions in your company since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?" (Question 21); (3) "If so, what is the level of the labor shortage/lack of qualified workers experienced by your company since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?" (Question 22); and (4) "Has this labor shortage changed your practices for hiring individuals involved in juvenile or adult corrections?" (Question 23). Responses were analyzed using a series of chi-square tests of independence between respondents' likelihood to hire youth in the juvenile justice system (Question 15) and responses to each of these items.

The result for the relationship between likelihood to hire (Question 15) and level of labor shortage (Question 20) was statistically significant, $\chi^2(9, n = 1,469) = 22.31, p < .01$, with those having a moderate problem finding qualified workers more apt to say "not sure" regarding whether they would hire youth

involved in the juvenile justice system. The result for the relationship between likelihood to hire (Question 15) and Question 21 was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, n = 1,469) = 15.20, p < .01$, with those experiencing no problem with the labor shortage reporting that they would be "less likely" to hire juvenile justice-involved youth. The result for the relationship between likelihood to hire and whether the labor shortage changed respondents' practices for hiring individuals involved in corrections (Question 23) was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, n = 1,469) = 23.16, p < .001$ with those reporting that the labor shortage had affected hiring practices saying that they would be "likely" or "very likely" to hire youth in the juvenile justice system. The result for the relationship between likelihood to hire and Question 22 (level of labor shortage since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic) was statistically nonsignificant.

We also conducted chi-square tests of independence between a respondent's opinion on disclosure and responses to Questions 20, 21, 22, and 23. The result for the relationship between opinion on disclosure and Question 23 was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,469) = 19.61, p < .001$, with respondents who believe youth should disclose being more likely to say the COVID-19-related labor shortage had affected their decisions relative to hiring youth in the juvenile justice system. Results for the relationships to Question 20, 21, and 22 were statistically nonsignificant.

Discussion

This survey was conducted in fall 2022, when work settings across multiple sectors were continuing to experience labor market fluctuations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Aughinbaugh et al., 2022; Ferguson & Lucy, 2023; Kwok, 2021). The current study explored how the COVID-19-related labor shortage may have affected employer perceptions of hiring youth in the juvenile justice system, which has implications for employer perspectives toward, and experiences with, hiring youth in the juvenile justice system (research question 1) and whether employers believe job applicants should disclose prior involvement in the juvenile justice system (research question 2). We found that employers facing labor shortages were more likely to hire youth in the juvenile justice system, compared to employers with full workforces.

The results suggest that hiring practices are dictated, in part, by the demand for workers, which can overshadow job applicant attributes that may be perceived as negative.

Our first research question examined the perspectives of employers toward, and experiences with, hiring youth in the juvenile justice system. Our results show that employers in the current sample indicated a slightly increased likelihood of employing youth in the juvenile justice system compared to findings from prior studies (Pham et al., 2015). In particular, our study found an 11 percentile gain compared to Pham et al. in 2015. This may reflect an upward shift in the value placed on workers by employers relative to the stigma of hiring youth with juvenile justice involvement. This is a promising finding, because prior research has demonstrated that employment protects against continued involvement in the justice system (Mathur & Griller Clark, 2014; Unruh et al., 2009).

Our second research question concerned whether employers believe job applicants should disclose prior involvement in the juvenile justice system. Our results show that, compared to findings from Pham et al. (2015), there was a 29 percentile difference in employers' beliefs that youth should disclose prior involvement in juvenile services. Forty percent of employers in our sample believe that youth should disclose juvenile services involvement compared to 62% in Pham et al. (2015). One possible explanation for these findings is that, at least in the current labor market, there could be less stigma associated with hiring youth with juvenile services involvement. If employers are aware that they are employing justice-involved youth, and if these youth demonstrate good employment skills, stigma might be reduced even further.

Our third research question examined employers' perceptions of the qualifications and personal factors that might influence their likelihood of hiring youth in the juvenile justice system. Our findings show that most employers believe passing a background check, passing a drug test, earning a high school diploma, having references from a previous employer, and having a driver's license are important work qualifications for job applicants. Of lesser importance are job-related skills, certifications, and Microsoft Office skills—which are more specific to each job and not essential for all positions. These results indicate that educational programs in

long-term correctional facilities should ensure that youth leave the facility with a high school diploma or equivalent. Career and technical education training should also be part of this programming, focusing on high-wage, high-demand occupational certifications rather than basic entry-level certificates.

Contextual features influence employer decisions about hiring youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Some of these relate to the place of employment, such as company policies, liability issues, or the type of position. The type of crime that was committed is also key. But many employers believe it is important to give second chances to youth who have a juvenile-justice-involved background. Further research is needed to explore how company policies can be amended to support employment of youth involved in the juvenile justice system—and to identify which business sectors, geographic locations, and business sizes would be most receptive to the idea of second chances. As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, the relative importance of these contextual features is changeable, depending on the availability of workers. With job shortages, youth in juvenile justice settings may have more opportunities for employment in some sectors.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. Employment policies related to youth in the juvenile justice system vary between states, which likely influenced survey responses. Also, the study did not limit the type of employer by the education level required to work at the company. Future work should target employers hiring entry-level workers who have not graduated from high school, or who have a high school diploma or equivalent. Because the type of crime was noted in this study as an important factor in making hiring decisions, future research should explore specific types of crimes influencing employment, as in Griller Clark et al. (2020). The generalizability of findings from this study is limited by our inability to calculate a response rate due to the Qualtrics recruitment methodology. Also, because respondents were incentivized by Qualtrics for participation, sampling bias may exist; there may be differences between those who responded and those who did not. The use of descriptive

statistics and chi-square analyses, though appropriate for this exploratory study, are limited in nature, because they focus on summarizing data and cannot be used to draw conclusions or test hypotheses.

Implications for Research

This study offers important implications for research. The results provide a broad snapshot of the perceptions of employers for hiring youth involved in the juvenile justice system, which may guide future directions in research. More sophisticated analyses and modeling are required to better understand group differences by demographic characteristics. A qualitative or mixed-methods study would allow further exploration of employers' hiring practices and stigma related to hiring youth in the juvenile justice system. Additional research is needed to determine whether these youth benefit from increased employment opportunities due to the COVID-19-pandemic-related labor shortage, and, if so, whether gaining employment reduces their continued involvement in juvenile services. Another avenue of research should determine how youth in the juvenile justice system overcome barriers and challenges to obtain and maintain employment. Finally, a policy analysis of hiring practices across the United States is warranted to further understand systemic or structural barriers to hiring youth in the juvenile justice system. Findings across states may be compared to understand which policies increase or decrease rates of employment among these youth.

Implications for Practice

Because employment helps protect youth from future justice involvement (Ashford & Gallagher, 2019; Bullis et al., 2002; Mathur & Griller Clark, 2014; Unruh et al., 2009), it is critical that educators and juvenile services personnel ensure that youth involved in juvenile services are trained in employment readiness skills. These youth must be supported to stay engaged in school and earn a diploma or equivalent. Because many employers believe the interview is an important place to disclose justice involvement, youth should have opportunities while incarcerated to practice talking about their involvement and sharing their accomplishments and experiences. Strategies for discussing disclosure could be braided into a self-advocacy

job-readiness training program, a predictor for post-school success for youth with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2015).

Practices for training youth in employment readiness skills, and for teaching youth to disclose justice system involvement with potential employers, may include behavior analytic practices such as behavioral skills training (BST). BST is a strategy for teaching a complex set of steps that includes instruction, modeling, practice, and feedback (Brogan et al., 2021; Edgemon et al., 2020). BST has been used in previous studies to teach interview skills and other job readiness skills to youth in correctional facilities (Brogan et al., 2021; Edgemon et al., 2020; Richling et al., 2019; Stocco et al., 2017) and is an important strategy for translating the findings of this study to practice. This and other behavior analytic strategies may help students develop the skills necessary to successfully gain and maintain employment.

Long-term correctional facilities can facilitate the educational process while youth are still incarcerated by having students work toward a completion document and ensuring students earn credits towards graduation that may be transferred to schools in the community. If youth leave the facility without a completion document, reentry specialists should help them enroll in an educational setting, and make sure that credits earned inside a justice institution are appropriately applied. Correctional facilities should align their career and technical education programs with local labor trends to help youth train on state-of-the-art equipment in career pathways leading to a credential, potentially earned within the facility, toward high-skill, high-wage jobs or apprenticeships in the community.

Conclusion

Gaining employment can be life-changing for youth in the juvenile justice system, because it increases their engagement in the community and reduces their future involvement in the system. The results of this study show that these youth face multiple barriers and challenges to gaining and maintaining employment, partly because of a lack of education and job skills and partly because of negative employer attitudes. A multipronged approach is needed to

provide appropriate job-readiness programs for youth involved in juvenile justice systems and to change employer perceptions about hiring these youth.

Data Availability Data used for this research can be made available upon request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Ameri, M., Schur, L., Adya, M., Bentley, F. S., McKay, P., & Kruse, D. (2018). The disability employment puzzle: A field experiment on employer hiring behavior. *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, 71(2), 329–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793917717474>
- Ashford, J., & Gallagher, J. (2019). Preventing juvenile transitions to adult crime: A pilot study of probation interventions for older, high-risk juvenile delinquents. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 46(8), 1148–1164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854819835277>
- Aughinbaugh, A., Rothstein, D. S. (2022). How did employment change during the COVID-19 pandemic? Evidence from a new BLS survey supplement. *Beyond the Numbers: Employment & Unemployment*, 11(1). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-11/how-did-employment-change-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.htm>
- Brogan, K. M., Rapp, J. T., Edgemon, A. K., Niedfeld, A. M., Coon, J. C., Thompson, K. R., & Burkhart, B. R. (2021). Behavioral skills training to increase appropriate reactions of adolescent males in residential treatment. *Behavior Modification*, 45(4), 535–559. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445519880837>
- Bullis, M., Yovanoff, P., Mueller, G., & Havel, E. (2002). Life on the “outs”: Examination of the facility-to-community transition of incarcerated youth. *Exceptional Children*, 69(1), 7–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290206900101>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2020). COVID-19 juvenile justice survey: Youth detention admissions fell by more than half in two months. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/covid-19-juvenile-justice-survey-youth-detention-admissions-fell-by-more-th/>
- Cerda, J. A., Stenstrom, D. M., & Curtis, M. (2015). The role of type of offense and work qualifications on perceived employability of former offenders. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(2), 317–335. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-014-9244-8>
- Chan, C.-H., Chan, G. C., Leeper, T. J., Becker, J. (2018). *Rio: A Swiss-Army knife for data file i/o*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=rio>
- Decker, S. H., Ortiz, N., Spohn, C., & Hedberg, E. (2015). Criminal stigma, race, and ethnicity: The consequences of imprisonment for employment. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 43(2), 108–121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2015.02.002>
- Dillman, D. A. (2007). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method*. Wiley.
- Edgemon, A. K., Rapp, J. T., Brogan, K. M., Richling, S. M., Hamrick, S. A., Peters, R. J., & O'Rourke, S. A. (2020). Behavioral skills training to increase interview skills of adolescent males in a juvenile residential treatment facility. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 53(4), 2303–2318. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.707>
- Ferguson, S. (2022). *Understanding America's labor shortage: The most impacted industries*. U.S Chamber of Commerce <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage-the-most-impacted-industries>
- Ferguson, S., & Lucy, I. (2023). *America Works Data Center*. U.S Chamber of Commerce <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/america-works-data-center>
- Firke, S. (2019). *Janitor: Simple tools for examining and cleaning dirty data*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=janitor>
- Gilbride, D., Stensrud, R., Vandergoot, D., & Golden, K. (2003). Identification of the characteristics of work environments and employers open to hiring and accommodating people with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 46(3), 130–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00343552030460030101>
- Goda, G. S., Soltas, E. J. (2022). *The impacts of Covid-19 illnesses on workers*. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 30435. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w30435>
- Griller Clark, H., Mathur, S. R., Ott, M., & McTier, T. S., Jr. (2020). Employer perceptions of hiring juveniles with criminal records. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 47(9), 1156–1175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854820919914>
- Houtenville, A., & Kalargyrou, V. (2015). Employers' perspectives about employing people with disabilities: A comparative study across industries. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 56(2), 168–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965514551633>
- Joseph, M.-A.M., Osmanu, K., & Moss, K. (2017). Ethical considerations for working with transition aged youth and students with disabilities given the implications of WIOA. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 48(2), 42–47. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0047-2220.48.2.42>

- Ju, S., Roberts, E., & Zhang, D. (2013). Employer attitudes toward workers with disabilities: A review of research in the past decade. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 38(2), 113–123. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-130625>
- Ju, S., Pacha, J., Moore, K., & Zhang, D. (2014). Employability skills for entry-level employees with and without disabilities: A comparison between the perspectives of educators and employers. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 40(3), 203–212. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-140685>
- Kaye, H. S. (2010). The impact of the 2007–09 recession of workers with disabilities. *Monthly Labor Review*, 133(10), 19–30.
- Kwok, L. (2021). Labor shortage challenge in post-pandemic: Reasons, possible solutions, and research directions. *Psychology & Behavioral Science International Journal*, 18(1), 555976.
- Lauer, E. A., & Houtenville, A. J. (2018). *Annual disability statistics compendium: 2017*. University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability.
- Livermore, G. A., Goodman, N. (2009). *A review of recent evaluation efforts associated with programs and policies designed to promote the employment of adults with disabilities: Report*. Rehabilitation Research & Training Center for Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Cornell University.
- Mathur, S. R., & Griller Clark, H. (2014). Community engagement for reentry success of youth from juvenile justice: Challenges and opportunities. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 37(4), 713–734. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2014.0034>
- Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Sinclair, J., Poppen, M., Woods, W. E., & Shearer, M. L. (2015). Predictors of post-school success: A systematic review of NLT2 secondary analyses. *Career Development & Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 39(4), 196–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143415588047>
- Morgan, R. L., & Alexander, M. (2005). The employer's perception: Employment of individuals with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 23(1), 39–49.
- Müller, K. (2017). *Here: A simpler way to find your files*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=here>
- National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth. (2009). *Promoting the effectiveness of individualized learning plans: Improving workforce transitions for students with disabilities*. Office of Disability Employment Policy.
- National Juvenile Justice Network & Texas Public Policy Foundation (2013). *The comeback states: Reducing youth incarceration in the United States*. http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/Comeback-States-Report_FINAL.pdf
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development. (2010). *OECD employment outlook 2010: Moving beyond the jobs crisis*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/empl_outlook-2010-en
- Ott, M., & McTier, T. S., Jr. (2020). Faculty attitudes toward college students with criminal records. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 13(4), 297–308. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000138>
- Pham, Y. K., Unruh, D. K., & Waintrup, M. (2015). Employers' Perceptions on the Disclosure of Juvenile Records. *Journal of Juvenile Justice*, 4(2), 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854820919914>
- R Core Team. (2022). *R: A language and environment for statistical computing*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing <https://www.R-project.org/>
- Revelle, W. (2018) *Psych: Procedures for personality and psychological research*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=psych>
- Richling, S. M., Williams, W. L., & Carr, J. E. (2019). The effects of different mastery criteria on the skill maintenance of children with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 52(3), 701–717. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.580>
- Robinson, D., Hayes, A. (2019). *Broom: Convert statistical objects into tidy tibbles*. <https://broom.tidyverse.org/>, <http://github.com/tidymodels/broom>
- Schur, L., Kruse, D., & Blanck, P. (2013). *People with disabilities: Sideline or mainstreamed?* Cambridge University Press.
- Shandra, C. L., & Hogan, D. P. (2008). School-to-work program participation and the post-high school employment of young adults with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 29(2), 117–130.
- Snydman, J. (2022). *Unlocking futures: Youth with learning disabilities and the juvenile justice system*. National Center for Learning Disabilities.
- Stapleton, D. C., & Burkhauser, R. V. (2003). *The decline in employment of people with disabilities: A policy puzzle*. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Stocco, C. S., Thompson, R. H., Hart, J. M., & Soriano, H. L. (2017). Improving the interview skills of college students using behavioral skills training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 50(3), 495–510. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.385>
- Unger, D. D. (2002). Employers' attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce: Myths or realities? *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities*, 17(1), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/108835760201700101>
- Unruh, D. K., Gau, J. M., & Waintrup, M. G. (2009). An exploration of factors reducing recidivism rates of formerly incarcerated youth with disabilities participating in a re-entry intervention. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 18(3), 284–293. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-008-9228-8>
- Unruh, D., Waintrup, M., Alverson, C., Erickson, M., & MaGee, C. (2019). Stakeholders' perspectives of reentry to school and community for young offenders with disabilities: An ecological approach. *Behavioral Disorders*, 46(3), 175–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0198742919891414>
- Varghese, F. P., Hardin, E. E., Bauer, R. L., & Morgan, R. D. (2010). Attitudes toward hiring offenders: The roles of criminal history, job qualifications, and race. *International Journal of Offender Therapy & Comparative*

- Criminology*, 54(5), 769–782. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X09344960>
- Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Garza, N., Levine, P. (2005). *After high school: A first look at the postschool experiences of youth with disabilities*. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). SRI International.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Webb, K. W. (2011). *Handbook of adolescent transition education for youth with disabilities*. Routledge.
- Wickham, H., Hester, J., Chang, W. (2019a). *Devtools: Tools to make developing r packages easier*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=devtools>
- Wickham, H., François, R., Henry, L., Müller, K. (2019b). *Dplyr: A grammar of data manipulation*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=dplyr>
- Wickham, H. (2017). *Tidyverse: Easily install and load the “tidyverse.”* <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=tidyverse>
- World Health Organization & World Bank. (2011). *World report on disability 2011*. World Health Organization <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44575>